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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [AG](#) [FR](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: FRENCH DOUBT GOA/POLISARIO WILL AGREE TO A REFUGEE  
CENSUS

REF: STATE 201212

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Bruce Turner, reason  
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche to Christian Testo, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb on December 28. Testo agreed that resolving the number of Sahrawi refugees in Algeria is "a critical question," but doubted that the Polisario would agree to a census outside the context of a final resolution to the Western Sahara conflict. The Polisario, he added, are clearly worried that a census would reveal the presence of fewer Sahrawi refugees than claimed and thus weaken the Polisario's political clout.

¶2. (C) Testo predicted that the Algerians would be even less flexible than the Polisario on a census. "If you press them on the census, I expect they will respond politely and find excuses for doing nothing. If we (i.e., France) press them, they will accuse us of working for the Moroccans," he said. In sum, the French diplomat said he saw no room for maneuver: "The Algerians will not budge."

¶3. (C) Returning to his mention of Morocco, Testo noted that the Quai took advantage of a mid-December visit by the Moroccan PM to stress that Morocco's autonomy plan for the Western Sahara (due to be unveiled in early 2007) must be credible. "We told them that it was a given that Algeria and the Polisario would reject the plan whatever its content, so they shouldn't worry about that. Instead, they should focus on making the plan credible enough to win the backing of the international community, which would put Morocco in the stronger diplomatic position," said Testo.

¶4. (C) Anticipating that the Algerians and Polisario would continue to resist entering direct negotiations with Morocco even after the appearance of the Moroccan autonomy plan, Testot suggested that an expanded set of talks (e.g., incorporating key actors in the international community) might be a means of bringing the parties to the table.

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